

Words of welcome at the
Celebration of the 10th Anniversary of the
New South Africa

Ottawa
March 25, 2004

Maureen O'Neil, President
International Development Research Centre (Canada)

Mesdames et Messieurs, bienvenue au CRDI. C'est avec un immense plaisir que nous vous accueillons ici ce soir pour souligner les dix ans d'existence de la nouvelle Afrique du Sud.

Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC). I am delighted that you are able to join us tonight to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the new South Africa. The Canadian International Development Agency, the department of Foreign Affairs, IDRC, and the South African High Commission have collaborated to organize this reception, which reflects the fruitful and robust relationship Canada shares with South Africa.

The success of this association between our two countries can be attributed to the multiplicity of stakeholders who believed in South Africa – which includes government as well as NGOs, academics and the private sector. The people in this room are a testament to this. You played a role in pressuring South Africa to dismantle its racist system and promote the establishment of a multi-ethnic, multi-racial, democratic society. You have contributed to its transformation and ultimate success.

Chacun d'entre vous ici ce soir a contribué d'une façon quelconque à la métamorphose de cet extraordinaire pays qui est l'Afrique du Sud.

Canada, through IDRC, played a pivotal role in supporting the transition to democracy, and continues to help build a new South Africa. In 1988, IDRC was one of only a few international organizations working in South Africa, and was assisting the Mass Democratic Movement in the areas of economic policy, urban governance, and health. At that time, apartheid was very much in force, the ANC and other anti-apartheid movements were officially banned, Nelson Mandela was in prison, and the international boycott of South Africa was still in place. The South African government declared IDRC an organization *non grata* and denied IDRC access to the country. The Centre responded by supporting the research work of anti-apartheid researchers in exile and by developing projects for South Africa through other southern African states. When Nelson Mandela was released from prison in 1990, and anti-apartheid organizations were legalized, IDRC staff were then able to work actively in the country with South African researchers. In

1992, IDRC became one of the first international organizations to open a regional office based in South Africa.

Canada's contribution to the transition of South Africa was unique in several ways. Canadian projects engaged predominantly South African researchers and experts. This approach was consistent with IDRC's longstanding experience in working shoulder-to-shoulder with developing-country researchers in the belief that building Southern capacity is one of the cornerstones of development. This evening, we gather to celebrate the new South Africa that has taken full advantage of this cornerstone and that became a country of emerging markets.

South African researchers were also exposed to an inclusive, consultative policy process – another cornerstone of IDRC's approach – and met with a broad range of stakeholders. When the first democratic government was formed in 1994, more than half of the cabinet ministers had participated in IDRC projects. This had a direct influence on policy in South Africa, which has in turn positively affected the lives of the country's citizens.

Most of the organizations represented here tonight continue to collaborate with South Africa. The recent signing of a Joint Declaration of Intent between the Government of Canada and the Government of South Africa during the State Visit of President Thabo Mbeki further strengthens our collaboration. And it is only the beginning.

En effet, la collaboration entre le Canada et l'Afrique du Sud est exceptionnelle. Ensemble nous avons accompli beaucoup en peu de temps. Et la réception de ce soir est une belle occasion pour célébrer ces liens solides et fructueux qui nous unissent.

I will now ask Mr. Robert Fowler, Personal Representative of the Prime Minister for Africa – and our Ambassador to Italy – and later Mrs. Wendy Mayimele, South Africa's Acting High Commissioner to Canada, to say a few words.

Mr. Fowler ...